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Dr. Payel Dutta Chowdhury

Professor & Director

School of Arts & Humanities

REVA University

Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

[payeldutta.c@gmail.com](mailto:payeldutta.c@gmail.com)

Christina Lalengzuali

M.A. English

School of Arts & Humanities

REVA University

Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

“Whose Glass Slippers are these?” A Study of the Unexplored Voices of Cinderella’s Stepsister in Gregory Maguire’s *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*

**Abstract:** Fairy tales have always captivated young readers and form a part of their reading material. Since most of the fairy tales have their source in oral folktales, they highlight traditional gender roles and create stereotypes. As Maria Nikolajeva states, fairy tales “reflects its own time and society” and with the change in readership over the course of time, there has been a need for a change in the tales. Revisionist authors have taken it upon themselves to retell several popular fairy tales from different perspectives.

This paper is an attempt to study Gregory Maguire’s *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* (1999) as an alternate reading, highlighting ignored and unexplored voices, creating different points of view not limited to the stereotypes provided in the original tale. Maguire’s revision of the

‘Cinderella’ story makes an interesting study where the highlight is not on the Cinderella figure, but on her stepsister. Using the theoretical framework of gender studies, this paper will explore the concepts of the beauty myth, the stereotypical images of good and bad in fairy tales, and the roles of parents and parenting in Maguire’s book vis-à-vis the original Cinderella narrative.

Keywords: Cinderella, revisionism, fairy tales, beauty myth, gender, stereotypes, stepsister

Once

The wife of a rich man was on her deathbed

and she said to her daughter Cinderella:

Be devout. Be good. Then I will smile

down from heaven in the seam of a cloud.

The man took another wife who had

two daughters, pretty enough

but with hearts like blackjacks.

Cinderella was their maid.

She slept on the sooty hearth each night

and walked around looking like Al Jolson.

Her father brought presents home from town,

jewels and gowns for the other women

but the twig of a tree for Cinderella....

Next came the ball, as you all know.

It was a marriage market.

The prince was looking for a wife.

All but Cinderella were preparing

and gussying up for the event.

Cinderella begged to go too.

Her stepmother threw a dish of lentils

into the cinders and said: Pick them

up in an hour and you shall go.

The white dove brought all his friends;

all the warm wings of the fatherland came,

and picked up the lentils in a jiffy.

No, Cinderella, said the stepmother,

you have no clothes and cannot dance.

That's the way with stepmothers....

At the wedding ceremony

the two sisters came to curry favor

and the white dove pecked their eyes out.

Two hollow spots were left

Like soup spoons. (Sexton 54)

The earliest version of the tale of ‘Cinderella’, the story of a Greek slave girl named Rhodopis, is believed to have been recorded in 7 B.C. Thereafter, the story of the ‘Cinder’ girl has found place in the fairy tales of several countries all over the world. In Great Britain, various aspects of the story of Cinderella can be seen in the tale of the princess Cordelia and her father King Lier, which was later on adapted by William Shakespeare into the play, *King Lear*. The other early written versions of the story are - ‘Cenerentola’ in Italian by Basil in 1634, ‘Cendrillon’ in French by Perrault in 1697, and ‘Aschenputtel’ in German by the Brothers Grimm in 1812. With every written version, the story underwent certain changes. In

Basil's version, the story had its usual foundation in the wicked stepmother, the evil stepsisters and the slippers. Perrault's story had added new symbols – the pumpkin and the fairy godmother – and Cendrillon's slippers were not ordinary ones, but made of glass. In *Children's and Household Tales* by the Brothers Grimm, Aschenputtel's stepsisters had to cut off their toes and heels in order to fit into the 'golden' slipper. The story also changed the benign figure of the fairy godmother and instead included a wishing tree which grants the girl whatever she wishes for. The 'Cinderella' story has also been translated into many languages and adapted into various operas and ballets, theatre, movies, television serials, songs, and computer games. With the growth of revisionist retellings, the story of 'Cinderella' has been adapted by various writers. Marissa Meyer's revision of the story is titled *Cinder* (2012) and is set in a futuristic city, New Beijing, where the protagonist is a cyborg mechanic. Gail Carson Levin's *Ella Enchanted* (1997) presents the Cinderella figure, Ella, under a fairy curse of obedience which binds her to act as she is told. Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes* (1982) presents a gruesome story where the prince cuts off the heads of the stepsisters. An interesting revision of the 'Cinderella' fairy tale is Dr. Richard A. Gardner's story 'Cinderelma' included in his collection *Dr. Gardner's Fairy Tales for Today's Children* (1974) where Cinderelma and the prince after being united, separate with mutual consent. Cinderelma moves ahead in life to become an entrepreneur and then later gets married to someone else. Another thought-provoking revision of the 'Cinderella' story has been attempted by Richard Conlon in 1995. His play *Anastasia and Drizella* focuses on the stepsisters of Cinderella and their growth in life. The play showcases Cinderella and the prince getting married but they end up serving as the servants of the stepsisters.

Gregory Maguire's *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* (1999) revises the classical fairytale 'Cinderella' from the perspective of the stepsisters. Set in 17<sup>th</sup> century Haarlem in Holland, Maguire's story focuses on Iris, the plain younger daughter of Margarethe Fisher, who gets

shelter in the house of a painter called Schoonmaker in exchange of doing his household chores. Schoonmaker's painting of Iris catches the attention of a wealthy man, Heer Der Meer, who on meeting the girl, wants her to shift to his house to give company to his daughter, Clara, and to teach her English. Iris is left with no other choice and shifts along with her mother and older sister, Ruth. The story unfolds with the death of Clara's mother, the marriage of Heer Der Meer to Margarethe, the loss of business and health of Van Der Meer, and Clara's marriage to the Dowager Queen of France's godson. Maguire's story revises the portrayal of the Cinderella figure and brings in alternate perspectives on the wicked stepsisters of the original tale. He gives a more detailed space to them and even though imperfect, his characters are definitely more realistic. Maguire's portrayal of the stepsisters, the stepmother, and Clara are authentic and unlike fairy tales, where good and evil are exaggerated, readers can relate to the characters. Scholars have been particularly interested in exploring the use of various symbols and metaphors in the 'Cinderella' story and lots of studies have focused on the figure of the stepmother, the glass/ golden slippers, the ball, the ball gown and so on. Maguire's story, in particular, revises the negative image of the stepsisters and instead looks at the probability of a sisterly bonding rejuvenating Clara's life. Also certain symbols, like the slippers and the ball gown, are given fresh dimensions and new ones, like the significance of Schoonmaker's paintings and the kitchen space, are explored to add fresh perspectives to the story.

Maguire's revision of the 'Cinderella' tale primarily creates an alternate image of the stepsisters and also Cinderella. The younger stepsister, Iris, is the main focus of Maguire's text. Labeled as "Iris the Ugly" (Maguire 1999), she is smart, self-conscious, kind, caring, reliable and obedient. The portrayal of the stepsisters in the *Grimm's Fairy Tale* is completely contrary to Maguire's revision. The Brothers Grimm portray the daughters of the stepmother as "beautiful and fair of face, but vile and black of heart." (Grimm 1944) Unlike the ugly, stupid, lazy and cruel stepsister in 'Cinderella', Iris is a good-natured girl and manages all household

chores and keeps the family together. Iris may be plain to look at but is matured and responsible. She is the one who takes care of Ruth, her slow-wit elder sister and considers Clara, her stepsister, as her own and does not hesitate to offer her solace and bring in improvement in her life. Maguire's portrayal of Iris is very authentic. Even though good-natured, sometimes she gets tired of all the responsibilities thrust upon her, gets tired of taking care of Ruth and also all the harsh words imposed on her by her mother, Clara and the master. Even though the youngest one, it is her responsibility to "befriend the distant, suspicious child (Clara), to gain her trust, to teach her English, to vary her days." (Maguire 1999) The enormous responsibility on her tiny shoulders makes her get tired and she wishes to be transformed into "a changeling if I could...turn me into a flounder, a sparrow, a doormouse.....turn me into sad thick Ruth! Anything or anyone that is too dull to be able to think about herself. It's the endlessly thinking about yourself that causes such heart shame." (Maguire 1999) She keeps thinking, "Is it my lot in life to arrange peace among all parties? And why should that be?" (Maguire 1999) Her lack of beauty causes her to lose confidence in herself. She feels that her physical appearance is a curse as it stops her from doing what she wants. Ruth, the other stepsister, is slow-witted and timid, but of course, not the evil one as portrayed in the various versions of the 'Cinderella' tale. Maguire also revises the usual portrayal of the Cinderella figure in Clara. She is indeed beautiful but is also obstinate and sulks and cries all the time. The author's attention seems to focus on the goodness of heart rather than physical beauty and in that it is Iris who is the real princess. Whereas Iris is all-giving and a manager of everyone's lives in the household, offering them comfort and pulling the family together, Clara is absorbed in her gloomy life and does not actually take any step to improve things.

Revisionist fairy tales, among other things, examine the use of the concept of the beauty myth which creates stereotypical images of women in traditional narratives. Maguire's revision highlights the faultiness of such archetypes while stressing on the idea that "beauty is a

currency forged for the benefit of those in power rather than an intrinsic attribute.” (Susan Sellers 2001) The notion of the beautiful and virtuous damsels in distress has been a recurring image in fairy tales, leading to the association of physical beauty with virtue and ugliness with evil. The publication of the book *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf in 1990 created a furor worldwide and issues related to the physical beauty of women were being debated at every forum. Maguire’s revision of the ‘Cinderella’ tale foregrounds goodness of heart as the optimum virtue in a human being rather than physical beauty. However, contrary to this picture of promoting virtue in heart and deeds, Maguire’s central plot remains the same – it is beauty which is appreciated and wins everyone’s heart. Clara is perfectly beautiful and her beauty wins the heart of the prince. If not for her beauty, she would still be the ‘Cinder girl’ in the kitchen dressed like a maid. Maguire’s revision ironically highlights how the image of beauty is used against women. Iris, who is already conscious of her ‘ugly’ looks, grows doubly so in Clara’s presence. It is indeed true that “(a)t the heart of the beauty myth is the fact that we believe we are engaged in a battle. It often makes us feel jealous of other women and girls, and strangers whom we deem more beautiful than ourselves. The part of this raging war that’s actually ironic is that the girl you might think has it all is often feeling the same self-doubt you feel.” (Stefanie Iris Weiss 2003) Iris’s self-consciousness leads her to feel miserable in front of Caspar whom she loves dearly. She has always been made aware of her ugly looks by her own family. Her mother too does not hesitate to judge her based on her looks. Iris has no misconception about her looks and describes herself thus: “I with my nose like a spring carrot, I with my arms like awls, my bosom small and indistinct...I, the monstrously ugly among us.” (Maguire 1999) The beautiful Clara makes Iris constantly conscious of her looks and while she genuinely praises her half-sister, her bitterness cannot be ignored – “You look serene, and distant, and mysterious....You make us look like a couple of turnips, but it is no different. We are turnips and you are a tulip.” (Maguire 1999) Iris seems to be more conscious of her looks

around Clara and while comparing herself with her stepsister, she ends up feeling insecure. In this self-absorption regarding physical beauty, she sidelines the good qualities she possesses. She craves for attention unlike Clara who wants solitude. Ironically, Clara's beauty fetches her all the attention whether she craves for it or not. Ugliness becomes Iris' burden, beyond which she cannot view herself. She is head over heels in love with Casper but because of her physical ugliness, she does not dare expect his attention. Although she feels jealous of Clara at times, she is pure at heart and accepts her ugliness. However, she thinks too lowly about herself and is scared to ever hope for a better life. Her lack of beauty always seems to be the wall that blocks her from doing what she craves for or getting what she wants. The master, who is one person who seems to appreciate her for what she is, tells her, "Self-mockery is an uglier thing than any human face, Iris. No one can pretend you are wench, but you are smart and you are kind. Don't betray those impulses in yourself. Don't belabor the lack of physical beauty, which in any case eventually flees those who have it, and makes them sad."(Maguire 1999) In Maguire's fictional world, there are men like the master and Caspar who know the real meaning of goodness and virtue. The master tells Iris that inner beauty is primary and she possesses that, so she should not mock herself for her lack of superficial beauty. In the words of Ruth, Maguire summarizes his view on the myth of beauty in the epilogue:

"Crows and scavengers at the top of the story, finches at the top of the linden tree. God and Satan snarling at each other like dogs. Imps and fairy godmothers trying to undo each other's work. You might be born as the donkey-jawed Dame Handelaers or as dazzling Clara Van Der Meer, Young Woman With Tulips. How we try to pin the world between opposite extremes! And in such a world, as Margarethe used to ask, what is the use of beauty? I have lived my live surrounded by painters, and I still do not know the answer. But I suspect, some days, that beauty helps protect the spirit of mankind, swaddle it and succor it, so that we might survive. Beauty is no end in itself, but if it

makes our lives less miserable so that we might be more kind – well, then, let's have beauty, painted on our porcelain, hanging on our walls, ringing through our stories. We are sorry tribe of beasts. We need all the help we can get."(Maguire 1999)

A study of the fairy tales in the collection by Brothers Grimm highlights that a great number of the stories use the metaphor of 'beauty' in association with virtue in a woman. Thus, the image of fair complexioned beautiful damsels in distress abound those fairy tales. Women's physical beauty is the yardstick by which the good and the evil are designated. Fairy tales like 'Cinderella' showcases how lack of beauty automatically gets connected to the evil and thus, the "evil stepsisters in *Cinderella* are an example of how, at least in the author's minds, unattractive women treat their attractive counterparts. In this respect, a character's beauty puts them in danger; their tempting physical form sets them up for another form of victimization." (Alice Neikerk) Maguire's revision of the 'Cinderella' tale primarily demystifies the association of beauty with goodness and thus, creates in Iris an authentic protagonist, who may be plain in her looks but has a golden heart. The emphasis on beauty has been discussed in length by Naomi Wolf as a fabrication of the patriarchal setup and in this context, many critics view even the 'wicked stepmother' as a victim of the societal norms of physical beauty. Commenting on the negative impact of the connection of physical beauty to success in life, Anahit Behrooz says,

"In *Aschenputtel* we see the darker side of this beauty ideal, where the stepmother encourages her daughters to mutilate their feet in order to fit into the slipper and trick the prince. Particularly for modern readers, this will be uncomfortably reminiscent of the present-day beauty industry, of the plastic-surgery, Photoshop and eating disorders which twist and conform women into the requisite beauty ideal. If this is the world the stepmother is forced into, where she must viciously compete with other women in order to attract and keep men, and therefore status,

stability and significance, her resorting to evil in order to maintain her position becomes, if not justifiable, at least understandable. By seeing the stepmother as a victim of patriarchal values, much in the same way the heroines are a victim of her, her character becomes more than the trope of ‘Wicked Queen’ or ‘Evil Stepmother’, but rather a complex character deserving of the reader's consideration and sympathy.” Maguire's text sidelines this myth regarding physical beauty of women and presents instead the importance of virtues of one's character.

While studying Maguire's portrayal of Iris, it becomes imperative for readers to explore her relationship with the other primary characters in the book. Iris' virtues are mainly recognized in her being a support system to people around her. She is a mother-figure to Ruth and looks after her, cleans her, comforts her and even puts her to bed. She never leaves her behind. Even though sometimes Ruth becomes a burden for Iris, she cares for her without any grudges. Iris is the one who tolerates Clara's rude and annoying talks and teaches her English. She keeps her company by telling her stories while Schoonmaker makes a painting of her so that Clara does not get bored. Maguire's text also highlights the strong bonding between the sisters. Iris and Ruth have a strong bonding as Iris looks after Ruth and is always beside her. Ruth does not show much of her emotions but she knows that Iris is always there for her. Clara, on the other hand, does not accept Iris or Ruth as her sister initially. She is always mean to both and wants them around only for her pleasure. But Iris is patient and tries her best to bond with Clara. Sometimes when Clara becomes impossible to deal with, Iris loses her patience but very soon her essential goodness of heart makes her realize that “... she is being unkind. Sisters - be they stepsisters, half sisters, or full sisters – sisters must do for each other. Isn't it how her mother raised her? Ruth can never do for herself, so Iris must do for her; and now Iris must do for Clara as well.” (Maguire 1999) In Maguire's revision, Iris is the real ‘Cinderella’, if beauty is considered primarily of the heart and not of the face. Iris is patient with Clara and she is ready

to do anything to keep her from wailing and causing trouble. Even though younger to Clara, she keeps her mind occupied with fanciful stories about imps and changelings and fairies to make her come out of the gloom. In Maguire's text, the Cinderella figure would have remained the 'cinder girl' forever had Iris not shown real goodness of heart by taking charge of Clara's life and pushing her ahead to attend the ball. Iris, in fact, turns to be the fairy godmother and makes the 'ash girl' look beautiful in her shiny gold outfit and a complete makeover. It is with Iris' positive influence that Clara becomes grounded and level headed. Iris trains Clara in practical living; she teaches her how to mend her hem even though Clara protests, pouts, makes fun of Iris' bossiness, she eventually learns how to do it. Gradually Clara understands the true nature of Iris and starts looking up to Iris and Ruth as her sisters. Playing the role of an ideal sister, she is able to provide comfort to Iris, who is always bothered about her looks, and tells her, "...mercy, there is nothing monstrously ugly about you. Ruth may be unpleasing, but you are merely plain. If anything, it's my beauty that's monstrous...." (Maguire 1999) The sisterly bonding continues lifelong as we get to know in the epilogue, through Ruth's information, that Clara supports Iris financially to pay off her debts.

Maguire places Iris in the centre of his narrative and it is through her relationships with the other characters that he highlights how the portrayal of the stepsister has been revised, thus, taking the place of the protagonist. The goodness in Iris' character is brought about in the way she patiently deals not only with her sisters, but with her mother too. Iris is an obedient child; she knows her mother is not a kind or good woman. Margarethe often sees her two daughters as burdens and calls them ugly. But despite this treatment Iris cares for her mother and relieves her of household burdens. She is often ordered by her mother to take care of Ruth as her mother calls her the smart one. Iris understands that Margarethe is rude and greedy but ambitious in a way to keep them alive. Even though plain in looks, Maguire's heroine has a charm which attracts the attention of others. The master takes the Fisher family in mainly because he wanted

to paint Iris. He fell for Margarethe but could not stop her from leaving his house to stay in a better one. The master is the only person in Iris' life who makes her feel good about herself, gives her hope, advises her and praises her. Van Der Meer is also interested in Schoonmaker's painting because of the girl (Iris) in the painting. He is so intrigued by the painting that he insists on seeing Iris, hires Schoonmaker to paint a portrait of his daughter and even goes to the extent of taking the Fisher family in his house. Iris' goodness is also understood by Casper, Schoonmaker's apprentice. He falls in love with Iris from the very first day he saw her. Iris is in love with him too, but burdened with the complex of her lack of beauty, she cannot express her feelings. It is by being with Casper that Iris discovers her love for painting and desires to take it up as a vocation seriously. Maguire portrays his heroine as an essentially good human being and retells the original fairy tale from her perspective, bringing out qualities that stand out in real life rather than physical beauty alone.

A study of fairy tales written across different cultures highlight the stereotypical image of mothers/ stepmothers portrayed in most of the stories. An analysis of the *Grimm's Fairy Tales* showcase the negative image attached to parenthood. Stepmothers, jealous of their children, abound in many of the tales of the Grimm Brothers. The fairy tales of 'Cinderella', 'Hansel and Gratel', 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs', 'The Six Swans', 'The Juniper Tree' are all well-known for the evil doings of the stepmothers. The wicked queen or the wicked stepmother is a stock figure in many western fairy tales. A quick search on the internet on the term 'wicked stepmother' reveals the vociferous ways in which narrators of fairy tales have used the motif of the stepmother to portray the evil. It was common in the olden days for women to die at a young age during childbirth. In such cases, the stepmother replaced the original mother and took over the responsibility of the household as well as the guardianship of the children of the former mistress. Various studies highlight that the original collection of fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm contained "themes of ancestral rape or attempted rape of a daughter by her

father.” (Neikirk) This negative image of the father figure was later on altered with the rise of patriarchal hegemony and shifted instead on the ‘wicked stepmother’ as the real mother as a cruel tormentor would be too hard to digest for the middle class reader. Highlighting on this shift, critics have noted that these revisions in the narratives were directed towards fitting into the moral frame of the young children and their parents in the middle class families. However, this led to the sudden absence of the patriarchal figure in the narratives, giving an impression of gaping holes in the plots. In stories like ‘Cinderella’, ‘Hansel and Gratel’ and ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’ the passivity of the father figure, witnessing the daughter being harmed and yet not taking steps of prevention, remains unexplained. Emphasizing on the father figure vis-à-vis the ‘wicked stepmother’ in the different variants of the ‘Cinderella’ story, Marshall observes, “In a definitive study of over three hundred versions of “Cinderella,” Marian Cox defines three variants of the tale: “Cinderella” (510A), in which the heroine is mistreated by her stepmother; “Catskin” (510B), a runaway daughter tale about a heroine pursued by an incestuous father; and “Cap O’ Rushes” (510C), in which a father demands a pledge of filial love (King Lear). Significantly, in the over three hundred Cinderella variants Cox analyzes, the incestuous father appears almost as often as does the evil stepmother; thus, as literary theorist Maria Tatar points out, the heroine is as likely to leave the home because of her father’s incestuous desire as her (step)mother’s tyranny.... In the process of revising and selecting variants in the ‘Cinderella’ cycle, the Grimms reconfigured the material to fit their social, historical, and political context.” (Marshall) The subsequent revisions in the narratives focusing on the wickedness of the stepmother overshadowed the crime of the wicked father. The stepmother in all these tales is stereotypically venomous and brutal and never kind and caring, leading to the general belief of negativity in her character in real life scenario too. In this connection, it is worthwhile to mention the depiction of the stepmother in SurLaLune Fairy Tales’ *Annotated Cinderella*:

“The stepmother is a common villain in fairy tales. The stepmother has been a villain since the earliest known versions of the Cinderella tale. The competition between the two women for the husband/ father's affection provides a logical reason for the stepmother's cruelty. However, the stepmother has often replaced mothers in other tales, such as Snow White, when the image of a cruel mother was considered to be too harsh and terrifying for young audiences. The image of the evil stepmother occurs frequently in fairy tales.... The stepmother figure is actually two sided, in that while she has destructive intentions, her actions often lead the protagonist into situations that identify and strengthen his or her best qualities. Perhaps one of the enduring elements of the Cinderella story comes from the politics of a family, usually a blended family. While many fairy tales have outside antagonists, Cinderella's trials are in her home and immediate family.”

This analysis provides us a glimpse of the politics related to the plight of the heroine in the narrative of ‘Cinderella’ and the effect of the shift in the role of the villain on young readers.

With the growth of revision in fairy tales in contemporary times, several issues came to the forefront and authors have felt the necessity to modify the tales from various angles. In Maguire’s revision of the ‘Cinderella’ tale, Clara’s mother, Henrika, in her short duration in the narrative, provides some contrast to the stepmother figure, Margarethe. Henrika’s world revolves around her daughter, whereas, Margarethe is not only mean to her stepdaughter but sees her own daughters too as burden. She is over-ambitious and gradually borders on the absurd. Clara’s constant indifference towards Maragarethe makes her feel the necessity to dominate the child and make Clara realize her position in the house. She emphasizes her new-found status to Clara – “Your behavior must reflect your understanding of my place in this house, I won’t tolerate your abuse. Is that understood?” (Maguire 1999) In Maguire’s text, however, Margarethe is far from the wicked stepmother portrayed in traditional fairy tales. She

is mean, dominating, and scheming, but at the same time, pathetic too. She is often turned down by her family members and has to continuously struggle to establish her position at home. Unlike the stock figure of the stepmother in fairytales, whose position is supreme in the household, Margarethe is often heard saying, “Are you all determined to undermine me....She stands and pounds the table with the bowl of a silver ladle. I am the mother here! Are none of you willing to acknowledge my position?” (Maguire 1999) She makes elaborate plan for a bright future for herself and her daughters but proves to be a bad manager of all affairs concerning their lives. In her treatment of Clara and confining her to the kitchen, Margarethe assumes the position of the stock stepmother figure to an extent. However, the kitchen serves as a refuge for Clara whereas for Iris, it is a limitation, a place where she does not have freedom. Clara stays in the kitchen to avoid Margarethe and the rest of the world; she is content in the kitchen. The kitchen seems to give her peace and freedom. But for Iris, it is a place where she has to do what is expected of her, where she is not free, and the kitchen limited her very existence. Iris feels that the kitchen is a place where she is reduced to an insignificant person who is caged to serve. Even though dressed in rags, covered in ashes, and limited to the confines of the kitchen, Clara seems to like this space the best in the entire house. Also unlike the original tale, Clara has the support of her stepsisters and is not as miserable as the original heroine.

Maguire’s portrayal of Van Der Meer, the father figure, provides an answer to the absence or the passivity of the patriarch in the ‘Cinderella’ tale. In Perrault’s tale, the absence of the father is somewhat understood from the fact that he is dominated by his second wife and cannot do much to prevent the ill-treatment of his daughter. But in the Brothers Grimm’s narrative, Aschenputtel’s relationship with her father is not clear. The father figure is not completely absent in the German tale and it is left unexplained why he tolerates the abuse of his daughter. It is also seen that he describes Aschenputtel as his “first wife’s child” (Grimm 1944) thus, highlighting his lack of involvement in the affairs concerning his daughter. The father figure

in the German version also plays an active role in suppressing the real identity of Aschenputtel to the prince. In Maguire's revision, Van Der Meer is portrayed in a different light. He marries Margarethe mainly with the intention of providing his daughter a guardian to look after her. His absence during Clara's struggles is due to his failing health and being bedridden. However, there are times when he protests vehemently against Margareth's treatment of his daughter and raises his voice seeing Clara reduced to the status of a maid in her own house. Maguire's patriarch, thus, is neither the rapacious nor the passive father who meekly witnesses the subjugation of his daughter.

It is a common feature in all revisionist texts to highlight the important symbols of the original narrative and modify those according to the perspective of the revised narrative. In the 'Cinderella' tale, it is usually the glass slippers which act as the most important symbol in the narrative and has been highlighted as the identifying item which changes the fate of the protagonist. This 'identifying item' differs in the variants of the 'Cinderella' tale. Perrault's version introduced the slippers made of glass, whereas, in the Brothers Grimm's narrative, Cinderella wears golden slippers. Various other narratives based on the 'Cinderella' tale replaced the slipper and introduced other identifying items, such as, an anklet, a ring, or a bracelet through which the prince gets to find his girl. The question of the unique shoe size of Cinderella has also been raised by some critics. It is not clear why Cinderella has such a size which does not match anyone else in the entire kingdom. The German narrative introduces the shedding of blood by the stepsisters to fit into the slipper which was not a part of Basile and Perrault's tales. Even though the sisters cut off their toe and heel and are able to fool the prince, the doves on the hazel tree alert the prince and reveal their secret. In Maguire's revisionist tale, Clara is made to wear the slippers purchased by Margarethe for herself. Even though the slippers perfectly match Clara's dress, there is no element of magic in her slippers as it is not handed over by any fairy godmother to her but belongs originally to her stepmother to whom

it must have fitted too. Maguire's text also includes another important symbol - Schoonmaker's painting of 'Young Woman With Tulips' – directly connected with the plot of the book. This painting plays a significant role for Van der Meer and his family as well as for Schoonmaker. Van Der Meer looks at the painting of Clara and fantasizes that people from all over the world will admire it and his daughter and he will never have any shortage of investors. His pride in his daughter is associated with the painting. For the master, the painting poses a dilemma. He could either be a public failure or be recognized as one of the major painters by the guests from Holland and bring him world-wide recognition. Schoonmaker is confused about what he wants, a part of him wishes that the painting is destroyed. The painting which has already brought him so much of recognition, has also set a very high standard for him, thus bringing about a finality to his capability. The master still wants to paint something better and more worthy than 'Young woman with Tulips,' he wants to do a work worthy of the ages, steady, unchangeable and perfect, so that he could die a happy man. Ironically, even before the Dowager Queen Marie de Medici could examine the painting and chose which one she likes, the painting was set on fire and with that his chance to be a greater man is taken away. The setting of fire on the painting also provides a glimpse of the true feelings of Ruth, the ugly stepsister in the periphery of the narrative.

*Confessions of an ugly Stepsister* revises the 'Cinderella' story and presents the unexplored voices of the stepsisters. Maguire provides an alternative by creating Iris, one of the stepsisters, as the central figure. His revision highlights the limitations of associating beauty with goodness and lack of beauty with evil. His portrayal of the stepsister in a positive light creates an alternate version and thus, gives scope to look beyond the usual representation of virtue in fair and beautiful damsels in distress. Maguire's text modifies the setting and situations in a more realistic way, enabling contemporary readers to connect with the story. He also presents an alternate image of the Cinderella figure in the obstinate and rude Clara who refuses to

accommodate reality and is too much engrossed in her own world. She chooses to remain the ‘cinder girl’ and does not take any step to improve her situation. In fact, her stepsister, Iris, pushes her towards the ball which leads to the change in her fate. Maguire’s revision also gives a glimpse of the future and does not merely conclude with ‘they lived happily ever after’. This view into the future from Ruth’s perspective makes Maguire’s book more authentic and easy to connect.

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